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Russell Refuses to Seek CIA Subsidy Substitute

By ART PINE

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WASHINGTON—Sen. Richard B. Russell has flatly turned down a request from President Lyndon B. Johnson that he serve on a special panel to develop a long-range substitute for CIA-style subsidies.

The Georgia senator, who heads the important Central Intelligence Agency watchdog subcommittee in the Senate, refused the presidential appointment during a telephone conversation with Johnson last week, he confirmed Monday.

A Senate source had said the President personally spent some 45 minutes on the phone trying to recruit Russell for the panel while the senator was on an inspection tour of MacDill AFB

near Tampa, Fla.

Russell said Monday he had declined the post simply because he didn't think such a panel would accomplish much. "I don't believe these groups ever do anything," he told a reporter.

Earlier, Russell had criticized last month's appointment of a three-man committee to investigate CIA subsidies to student organizations and private foundations.

"It seems to have become the custom of presidents of the United States to pass the buck to a committee in these cases," he commented Monday.

At a White House briefing last week, it was announced that the President intended to appoint a special panel to consider "long-range plans and financing" of

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alternative channels for CIA-style subsidies.

A White House spokesman said the members of the new panel still have not been selected.

The President had announced early last week that the CIA would no longer administer subsidies to private groups.

Ironically, however, it was Russell who first disclosed that the agency would curtail its subsidies, after a February committee meeting with CIA Director Richard Helms.

At the time, Russell recommended that the CIA discontinue its financial connections with private groups, but praised the subsidy program as "a very good one."

The Georgia senator said then he thought the subsidies "probably paid higher dividends in stopping Communist propaganda than almost any other program."

Monday, Russell reiterated his opinion that the government should continue to subsidize such activities when they are deemed to be in the national interest.

If a subsidy program can't be funneled through the CIA, then perhaps it might be placed under the State department or another agency, Russell suggested.

P-Pine, Wrb
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